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11 Sept. 1967

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Testimony of General Earle G. Wheeler, Chairman Joint
Chiefs of Staff Before Stennis Committee, 16 Aug. 1967

Results of the Air Offensive Against North Vietnam

In his prepared testimony, General Wheeler states that the air campaign against North Vietnam is going well. He concludes:

- (1) The life and economy of North Vietnam has been disrupted;
- (2) North Vietnamese manpower resources have been diverted to defend against and accommodate to air strikes;
- (3) North Vietnamese demands upon Communist nations for war materiel have increased substantially;
- (4) The bombing of North Vietnam is an integral and indispensable part of our overall strategy in Southeast Asia;
- (5) The air campaign against North Vietnam is achieving its objectives and is saving American and Allied lives in South Vietnam.

Objectives

The objectives of the air campaign have been ". . . to obstruct, reduce, and harass the flow of war-supporting materiel within North Vietnam, and from North Vietnam to South Vietnam, and to destroy the war-supporting facilities of the enemy. . . . to make clear to the leaders of North Vietnam that they will continue to play a heavy price so long as they carry on their aggression against the South."

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Remaining Targets

Prepared Testimony --

"With the exception of the three major ports of North Vietnam, targets in the buffer zone along the Chinese border, and targets located in heavily populated areas, the majority of known fixed military targets in North Vietnam have been struck."

Comment

Much of the questioning of General Wheeler was concerned with the number of significant targets remaining in North Vietnam. He stated that important targets remaining included 39 on the JCS list and 72 on the so-called CINCPAC list, for a total of 111. Of these, 70 targets not yet authorized for strike should be authorized. These targets ^{including} airfields, fertilizer plants, a few small POL targets, a few warehouse ^{and} areas, a couple of repair facilities located in the very heavily populated areas of Hanoi-Haiphong." Numerous questions were asked about the JCS procedures for authorizing targets and how frequently higher authorities disapproved JCS recommendations. The testimony brought out that the JCS has pushed for more targets than have been allowed although the ^{Joint Chiefs have} JCS itself has been more restrained than field commanders in target recommendations. Numerous leading questions were asked by members of the subcommittee to demonstrate that civilians in the Pentagon (and to a lesser extent the State

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Department) have seriously reduced the effectiveness of the air war by restricting the number of significant targets that could be brought under attack and thus increased US casualties in the South,

Haiphong Port

Prepared Testimony

"Haiphong Port is estimated to handle 85 percent of North Vietnam's maritime shipping, 95 percent of the POL imports, and over 70 percent of North Vietnam's total imports. However, these ports -- and specifically the shipping therein -- provide the greatest opportunity for incidents which could lead to further expansion of the roles of the Communist nations in the war."

Comments:

Under questioning General Wheeler indicated that the JCS had advocated that a way be found to obstruct or stop the flow of war-sapper making materials and other supplies through Haiphong. General Wheeler advocated ". . . directing attacks against selected but fairly remote areas of the Port of Haiphong, with the thought of -- if you want to use the term -- scaring the Soviets and other foreign flag shipping out of the harbor, and thereafter, of course, mining the harbor."

General Wheeler thought the first "clamp" around Haiphong could be applied in two weeks, weather permitting. With the weather worsening in mid-September, General Wheeler thought it would be harder

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to maintain the clamp but that such a campaign could bring substantial returns. Under additional questioning about Haiphong General Wheeler stated: "... it would be impossible even if you destroyed the Port of Haiphong or mined its approaches or both, to create a situation where the North Vietnamese, the Soviets and other countries would be unable to bring any supply or equipment into the country. They could bring it over the beaches, they could use other devices to keep a modicum of supply flowing. He based this conclusion, in part, on his own experience in World War II.

Use of Intelligence Estimates

General Wheeler's testimony was not as interlaced with intelligence estimates as that of the Secretary of Defense. In some instances where he did present intelligence estimates, he made it clear that he did not agree with the conclusions of the intelligence community.

General Wheeler stated that in 1966 the total of rail and sea-borne supplies furnished to North Vietnam totalled 1.5 million tons of which an estimated 1,080,000 tons came by sea. Total shipments were expected to increase to 2,050,000 tons in 1967. These are OER estimates that were supplied to a JCS Staff Officer on 11 August 1967. General Wheeler also indicated that 125,000 tons military supplies came by rail in 1966. This is believed to be a DIA estimate because OER estimates that about 200,000 tons of military supplies arrived by rail in 1966. General Wheeler also stated he believes some military

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goods also arrive by sea although he admitted that the intelligence community does not support him on this conclusion.

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References to CIA

Only one reference to CIA evaluations of the air war appeared in the testimony. The Chief Counsel, Mr. Kendall, made reference to a statement that appears in the monthly CIA-DIA monthly bomb damage assessment.

"The stepped up air campaign has caused major changes in the air defense system and caused widespread disruption of economic activities in North Vietnam. However, the North Vietnamese still retain the capability to support activities in South Vietnam at present or increased combat levels of force structures."

Mr. Kendall asked General Wheeler if he agreed that the Communists still have that capability to maintain present force levels and increase them, noting that Admiral Sharp thought they were at their ceiling now. General Wheeler replied they can certainly ^{maintain} ~~do it at~~ present levels because they are so doing. However, he questions whether the Communists can increase the force level by any substantial level because ~~he has~~ ^{in his} the opinion ~~that~~ we are hurting the North Vietnamese more than we recognize. There were no other references, direct or implied, about CIA's role in assessing the effects of the Rolling Thunder Program.

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General Wheeler stated that the North Vietnamese are now firing 25,000 tons of AAA ammunition per month. This is probably an early DIA estimate that has been greatly scaled down in recent weeks. The current DIA estimate is that 40,000 tons of AAA ammunition were fired during the first six months of 1967. We generally concur.

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